DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 294 IR 016 466

AUTHOR Aufderheide, Patricia
TITLE Media Literacy. A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy.
INSTITUTION Aspen Inst., Queenstown, MD.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-89843-137-9
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 44p.; Report on the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (Queenstown, MD, December 7-9, 1992). A product of the Communications and Society Program.
AVAILABLE FROM Aspen Institute, Communications and Society Program, 1755 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 501, Washington, DC 20036.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Information; *Communications; *Curriculum Development; Data Analysis; *Definitions; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; National Programs; Objectives; *Policy Formation; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Media Literacy; National Leadership Conference

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy was to shape a national framework for media literacy so that each participating group could demonstrate its own niche and role in achieving common objectives. This report details the approaches and conclusions of the 25 representative leaders of the media literacy movement who met to agree on a definition, vision, and framework for media literacy efforts in the United States. The basic definition spelled out media literacy as the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes. In the 2 days of discourse, conference participants saw common ground on a number of issues and endorsed a project in New Mexico as a test site where various groups might work to foster media literacy in the schools and beyond. Task forces were established to look at issues associated with curriculum and teacher training, foster communications among the groups interested in media literacy, and begin to write a prospectus for a Media Literacy Institute. The Institute will bring together the resources for intellectual underpinning, teacher training, and active participation in policy making and events. Appendixes contain: (1) a background paper by J. Francis Davis, "Media Literacy--From Activism to Exploration"; (2) a list of conference participants and organizations; and (3) the Aspen Institute's Communications and Society Program Statement. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 365 294

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Aspen Institute

Communications and Society

Media Literacy

A Report of The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy

PATRICIA AUFDERHEIDE
Rapporteur

CHARLES M. FIRESTONE
Program Director

IR016400

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Ralston

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FORUM REPORT

MEDIA LITERACY

A Report of
The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy

The Aspen Institute Wye Center
Queenstown, Maryland
December 7–9, 1992

by
Patricia Aufderheide
American University
Rapporteur

Charles M. Firestone
Director
Communications and Society Program
The Aspen Institute
Washington, D.C.

For additional copies of this report, please contact:

The Aspen Institute
Communications and Society Program
1755 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Suite 501
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 736-5818
Fax: (202) 986-1913

Charles M. Firestone
Director

Katharina Kopp
Program Coordinator and Production Editor

Copyright © 1993 by
The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute
Wye Center, P.O. Box 222
Queenstown, Maryland 21658
Published in the United States of America
in 1993 by The Aspen Institute

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN #0-89843-137-9

Layout and production: W. Daniel Wright

CONTENTS

FOREWORD v

THE REPORT

I. DEFINITION 1

II. BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE 2
A. The Canadian Experience 3
B. The German Experience 4
C. Initiatives in the United States 4

III. THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE 5
A. Challenges 5
B. Opportunities 6

IV. TOWARD A MEDIA LITERACY MOVEMENT 7
A. Needs 7
B. Approaches 7

APPENDIX A: Background Paper by J. Francis Davis
"Media Literacy—From Activism to Exploration" 11

APPENDIX B: Conference Participants/Media Literacy Organizations ..33

APPENDIX C: Communications and Society Program Statement 36

FOREWORD

The communication process involves transmission, a medium, and reception. Most communications policies, even those aimed at enhancing citizen access to a diversity of information sources, look to the transmission and media elements of the process. They pay little attention to the receiver. The media literacy movement seeks to create greater awareness and empowerment on the part of the human receiver, whether child or adult, in the school or outside of it. Generally, policy-makers understand that access to information needs physical connection and economic ability to access. But access also has a literacy component, that is communications competency. Despite the logic of attending to such literacies, the field is sorely under-appreciated in the United States.

The Conference. The purpose of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy was to shape a national framework or blueprint in which individual groups and institutions find their respective places, and from which funders, policy makers or critics can also assess individual or collaborative efforts and outcomes. This precise focus of the conference derived from an observation at a 1992 meeting on media literacy at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. There, it was suggested that the various and disparate media literacy groups in the United States were not gaining their objectives in part because funders and policy-makers were confused by lack of clarity and understanding as to what the various organizations did, how they related, and what the overall goals are. By building a common vision, framework, and understanding, each group could demonstrate its own niche and role in achieving the common objectives.

In December 1992, 25 representative leaders of the media literacy movement met at the Aspen Institute's Wye Woods campus to achieve these goals. In my opinion, the group made great progress in doing just that. By adjournment, these leaders agreed on a definition, vision, and framework for the foreseeable future of media literacy in the United States. Pat Aufderheide's report details the group's approaches and conclusions. They now face the very difficult task of following up on the considerable progress made at Wye with extremely few resources and funding sources available to them at this time.

Definition. The groups' representatives settled on a basic definition of media literacy: **it is the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes.** This definition could be expressed in many different ways. To some, analyzing was better expressed as decoding

or evaluating, and producing was better explained as encoding or providing alternative expression. Information, too, had several meanings, from bare symbols to a continuum of media that extends from print to video, to the new digital world of computerized multi-media.

More controversial was the extent to which "outcomes" should be a part of the definition of media literacy. Is media literacy important only to the extent that it enables one to be a better citizen in society? What is the role of ideology in the process? To what extent is an individual "media literate" if she just appreciates the aesthetics of a message without going further with it? Finally, by using the word "outcomes" we do not mean to confuse the reader between the common definition—*viz.*, results or effects—and the specialized educational definition of "outcome assessment," referred to in the text below, which refers to a specific kind of evaluation.

Resolution. The two days of discourse during the conference were rich with ideas and inspired debate. In the end, the leaders saw common ground on a number of levels. They agreed to try to work together more closely in order to bring about the broader goal of effectuating media literacy in the United States. It was recognized that, in the long run, the movement needed an institution that could generate research, coordinate publicity, determine a public policy agenda and that would serve to foster relationships among the various groups, with policy makers and the public at large. They endorsed one project in the State of New Mexico, as a test site where the various groups might work in concert to foster media literacy in the schools and beyond.* They agreed to an informal network where projects would be coordinated, and others interested in the subject would be included. And they agreed that they would create three task forces and three work products, if possible, as a result of this meeting.

First, a Task Force will look at the issues associated with **curriculum and teacher training**. This Task Force will suggest model curricula, and make specific suggestions regarding pre-service, in-service, and specifically summer teacher training for media literacy.

Second, a Task Force will foster **communications** among the various groups and individuals interested in media literacy. This Task Force will establish one or more networks, identify resources such as the databases being created by the National Telemedia Council and the National Association of Media Education, avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts, and arrive at common positions on issues where possible and where helpful.

* This is not intended to be exclusive, however. Other states, such as North Carolina have shown interest and progress in this area, and could also be subject to coordinated efforts of the groups involved.

Third, a Task Force will begin the process of writing a prospectus for a **Media Literacy Institute** on a grander scale than any of the groups had previously envisaged. This Institute would bring together in one organization the resources for an intellectual underpinning, teacher training, and active participation in policy-making and events. In turn, it would foster greater awareness of the need for media literacy, and more effective implementation of the goals of media literacy.

Outreach. The following Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, then, is a summary of the thinking and deliberation that led to these Task Forces and resolve of the groups represented at the meeting. In order to be effective, these meetings are necessarily limited in the number of participants. Yet, by the representative and leadership nature of those who did attend, we believe that this process will yield a positive and productive framework for future development of media literacy in the United States.

Acknowledgments. We thank The Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Catherine T. and John D. MacArthur Foundation, and the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation for their grants which made this project possible. We also thank Patricia Aufderheide for her rapporteur's summary, and J. Francis Davis for his background paper on the topic, both of which are in this Forum Report.

Each of the participants listed at the end of this volume generously gave his or her time to participate in the meeting, and will be giving even more time in the future to follow up on Task Force projects. Although each has had an opportunity to comment on the background paper and report, it is understood that each participant does not necessarily endorse every statement in each of those papers. We do want to thank each of them for their generosity of time and effort in this project.

We also want specifically to acknowledge and thank Elizabeth Thoman, executive director of the Center for Media and Values, Kathleen Tyner, executive director of Strategies for Media Literacy, and Marieli Rowe, executive director of the National Telemedia Council for their help in conceptualizing and planning the project. And finally, I want to acknowledge Katharina Kopp, Aspen Communications and Society Program Coordinator, and Catherine Clark, her predecessor, for their editorial work on the program and the reports.

Charles M. Firestone
Conference Moderator and Director
The Aspen Institute
Communications and Society Program
Washington, D.C.

A Report of
The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy

by Patricia Aufderheide
The Aspen Institute Wye Center
Queenstown, Maryland
December 7–9, 1992

Media literacy, the movement to expand notions of literacy to include the powerful post-print media that dominate our informational landscape, helps people understand, produce and negotiate meanings in a culture made up of powerful images, words and sounds.

I. Definition

A media literate person—and everyone should have the opportunity to become one—can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to all media. Emphases in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence. The range of emphases will expand with the growth of media literacy.

Just as there are a variety of emphases within the media literacy movement, there are different strategies and processes to achieve them. Some educators may focus their energies on analysis—perhaps studying the creation and reception of a television program like *The Cosby Show* and thus its significance for a multicultural but racially divided society. Others may emphasize acquiring production skills—for instance, the ability to produce a radio or television documentary or an interactive display on one's own neighborhood. Some may use media literacy as a vehicle to understand the economic infrastructure of mass media, as a key element in the social construction of public knowledge. Others may use it primarily as a method to study and express the unique aesthetic properties of a particular medium.

There have been and will be a broad array of constituencies for media literacy: young people, parents, teachers, librarians, administrators, citizens. And there are a variety of sites to teach and practice media literacy: public and private schools, churches, synagogues, universities, civic and voluntary

organizations serving youth and families, mass media from newspapers to television.

But no matter what the project, constituency or site, media educators share some beliefs. Media educators know that understanding how reality is constructed through media means understanding three interacting elements: the *production process* (including technological, economic, bureaucratic and legal constraints), the *text*, and the *audience/receiver/end-user*. In a slightly different formulation of the same understanding, they understand some basic precepts in common:

- media are constructed, and construct reality.
- media have commercial implications.
- media have ideological and political implications.
- form and content are related in each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes and conventions.
- receivers negotiate meaning in media.

Finally, media literacy educators in principle agree on a pedagogical approach. No matter what the setting or project, but particularly for formal learning, media educators insist that the process of learning embody the concepts being taught. Thus, media literacy learning is hands-on and experiential, democratic (the teacher is researcher and facilitator), and process-driven. Stressing as it does critical thinking, it is inquiry-based. Touching as it does on the welter of issues and experiences of daily life, it is interdisciplinary and cross-curricular.

II. Building on Experience

It is ironic and also understandable that the United States is the premier producer of international mass media, but that media literacy education is only beginning in this country. The United States has a culture fascinated with individualism and with the potential of technology to solve social problems. Its culture is also pervaded with commercialism such that, as one participant argued, it simultaneously produces a "culture of denial" about the cultural implications of commercialism. Media literacy is thus an especially difficult challenge in the United States.

The U.S. experience until recently has been that of a blizzard of idiosyncratic projects, typically driven by the passion of individual teachers and organizers. These include the regional media arts center Appalshop's efforts to rescue regional self-images; the Foxfire teaching experiment; the network building of the National Telemedia Council; individual media literacy courses

in schools and universities; programs with teenagers, people in housing projects and prisons; civic initiatives in support of the First Amendment; public forums on media influence in conjunction with industry organizations; the adoption of a Girl Scouts merit badge for media literacy; citizen activism around children's television legislation; cable access programs and practices; youth ministry programs in churches and synagogues; teacher education at the school and district level; and public television programs and outreach activities. Corporate projects and materials, in search of markets for new technologies, have also explored media literacy. This diversity reflects, among other things, the decentralized nature of U.S. education.

In the last several years, leaders in various media literacy arenas have coalesced around basic definitions, approaches and goals for media literacy. This emerging process has been reflected, inter alia, in the creation of the National Association for Media Education, and indeed in the conference itself.

The experience of other nations, as well as the history of individual efforts within the United States, may be important to the growth of media literacy here.

A. ***The Canadian Experience***

In Ontario, Canada, teachers built on English and Australian media literacy programs and practices, as well as on academic work in cultural studies. Recently media literacy became a mandated and funded element for grades 7–12, within language arts programs. Integrating it into formal schooling gave it unparalleled legitimacy. Currently Canadian media education organizations are lobbying in other provinces to repeat the Ontario initiative.

Elements of the Ontario success story include:

- a grassroots base with teachers, who first experimented with media literacy and then pressured provincial educational authorities to mandate it in the schools, specifying a percentage of time to spend on the subject in different grades;
- active support from boards of education;
- in-service training;
- consultative staff for teachers;
- publishing of textbooks and teacher-support materials;
- professional organizations;
- using evaluation methods that do justice to the processes implicit in media literacy activities;
- collaboration between teachers, parents, researchers and media professionals.

B. ***The German Experience***

In Germany, media literacy or "media competency," as it is termed, is a voluntary program in the schools, mostly for grades 5–10. It has a broad mandate, with the following specific goals:

- to compensate for negative media effects.
- to lead students to reflective reception.
- to educate students to authoritative use of all media.
- to encourage students to create media themselves.

Germany's media education is beset with the usual limitations of a voluntary program, including poor teacher preparedness (at most a third of teachers get university training in media). Textbooks and ample support materials do exist, although they are not typically tailored to particular age groups or subjects. Media competency classes are now extending beyond an initial focus on electronic media to all information technologies, from books to computers.

Also relevant is a mandatory curriculum in computer-information technology, exemplary in its integrative approach joining technological with socio-political concerns.

C. ***Initiatives in the United States***

Within the United States, both in-service and pre-service programs for teachers have attempted to put media literacy on the curricular agenda. In-service efforts are de-centralized and diverse, offered variously by such groups as Educational Video Center in New York, Strategies for Media Literacy in San Francisco, Center for Media and Values in Los Angeles, Southwest Alternate Media Project, the National Council of Teachers of English and others. The 1993 Institute on Media Education, supported by Harvard Graduate School of Education and drawing on the expertise of leading U.S. media literacy activists, is an example of training that also deepens institutional commitment to the approach.

As well, an adaptable and successful model for teacher training is the experience of the National Writing Project for English teachers, a project of the National Council of Teachers of English. The Project is an in-service, intensive teacher training summer program that is community-based and stresses learning by doing. This voluntary program reaches veteran teachers who want to learn better both how to write and teach, and both builds on and creates a community of reference for them.

Perhaps the most sustained institutional effort at pre-service training within formal schooling has been at Appalachian State University, where North Carolina's largest teacher training institution requires competence in media literacy and offers courses to that end. The success of that program reflects some useful strategies:

- searching for ways that media literacy fulfills existing mandates;
- finding links to other areas, e.g. health education and social studies, so that media literacy is not isolated within one course;
- paying attention to institutional context, particularly principals and library media specialists;
- training not only for subject matter but also in how to be change agents;
- defining and operationalizing productivity, effectiveness and evaluation.

III. The Current Landscape

A. *Challenges*

For those who want the heterogeneous experiences of local U.S. individuals and groups to grow into a movement, there are dramatic challenges in the current landscape, not least of which are the rapidly evolving technological possibilities.

Several key things have until now been lacking:

- a *central mission or mandate*, which could unite different expressions with differing goals. Thus, the constant need to differentiate oneself from a rival when appealing to funders has tended to divide potential allies;
- *infrastructure*—an operating foundation, a professional association, a central database and network;
- *legitimacy* of the kind granted by requiring such material in the schools;
- *basic information* on such areas as:
  - — what are media literacy success stories, and their lessons for repeating them?
  - — what curricula have been developed by individual teachers and schools?
  - — what are current educational objectives that might be met by media literacy?
  - — what kinds of teacher training for media literacy have been effective?
  - — what teacher training objectives could be met by media literacy?
  - — what don't people know now that demonstrates a need for media literacy ("pre-testing")?
- *evaluation* for media literacy. Outcome assessment, the measure of a media literate person and the programs that brought him or her to that

state, is still in a primitive state; the best extant evaluation models are extremely labor-intensive, and come from England and Australia.

Those who see formal schooling as a major target perceive the unyielding bureaucracy of both public schools and teacher training as a major stumbling block. They note that media literacy's natural link with critical pedagogy and the implicit reform agenda in its empowerment goals makes it suspect with traditional teachers and bureaucrats.

Furthermore:

- the school day is presently broken up into c. 45-minute segments, too short for much media experimentation;
- expensive, labor-intensive teacher training is needed, both at pre-service and in-service levels;
- budgets are being cut, while subsidies and release time for teachers would be necessary to encourage media literacy;
- textbooks and curricular materials are lacking;
- corporate media, most boldly Whittle's Channel One, have entered the schools with a commercial rather than educational agenda.

B. ***Opportunities***

Some of these very problems might also provide opportunities. For instance:

- Channel One offers a chance to enter into public dialogue and education on media, whether as part of the controversy over its acceptance or as an object of critical analysis and media literacy instruction.
- Some commercially funded enterprises, for instance the outreach efforts of the cable industry's Cable in the Classroom, may prove beneficial to teachers who understand how to use them.
- Although public schools may be hidebound by bureaucracy, alternative, private and religious schools (particularly Catholic) may be open to media literacy projects and programs. The 1992 Catholic Connections to Media Literacy Project will likely have a spillover effect for both public and private education.
- The need for educational reform is patent, and may be the subject of presidential concern in the new administration; media literacy might become part of a reform agenda. Pending legislation such as the re-authorization of the 'Elementary and Secondary Education Act' and the 'Ready-to-Learn Act' could be sources for federal funding of media literacy pilot projects at test sites around the country.

- The ever-more contentious battle between cable and telephone companies for entering into each other's businesses may provide opportunities to influence policy in support of media literacy. Citizen activism that uses this policymaking juncture to insist on a portion of the resources being devoted to educational and nonprofit purposes could highlight media literacy objectives.
- The frustrations of trying to introduce new material and different pedagogical approaches to entrenched teacher training programs might militate toward creating an entirely new degree instead—an M.A. in media education, offered perhaps to mid-career teachers.
- Teachers bucking the 45-minute classroom might be able to join forces with other teachers and thus pool class time.

IV. Toward a Media Literacy Movement

If media literacy is to become a nationwide movement with a coherent image and clear mandate, permitting widely flexible goals, it must take steps to meet some basic needs.

A. *Needs*

The growing movement for media literacy in the United States has several kinds of clear and urgent needs:

- *Data.* Researchers need to get some basic information on the kinds of questions listed in "Challenges."
- *Publicity.* Media literacy needs a coherent image and definition, so that individual programs are correctly perceived to participate in a larger movement.
- *Infrastructure.* The movement needs a home in several senses: an agenda-setting institution such as an operating foundation, a network, or an association.
- *Productive relationships.* The movement needs to build bridges with policymakers, with educational reformers, with creative people working within mass media and new technologies, and with activists and officials in voluntary organizations and public television.

B. *Approaches*

Participants in the leadership conference took several steps toward building a media literacy movement in the United States.

In terms of *data:* Nodes of task forces, which would involve people not present at the conference, were created to address fact-finding in the areas of

teacher training, networking, and the creation of an operating foundation for media literacy.

In terms of *publicity:* Two major actions were taken. First, participants endorsed in principle and set in motion the creation of a mission statement, which could become a common platform for diverse projects in media literacy. As well, a prize for model curricula in media literacy was proposed, through the National Council of Teachers of English.

In terms of *infrastructure:* The National Telemedia Council and the National Association of Media Education were encouraged in their respective networking efforts. It was recognized that the movement's diversity was part of its strength, and that networking among efforts was a highly constructive step. It was also recognized that task force efforts, including the creation of a common mission statement, would lead to establishing other institutions, such as an operating foundation.

In terms of *productive relationships:* the conference participants endorsed in principle a test site for media literacy in the schools, in New Mexico. New Mexico now has a media literacy requirement on the books. Thus, this project can become a place to garner publicity, establish relationships, and build networks.

APPENDICES

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix A

Media Literacy—From Activism to Exploration

Background Paper for The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy

by J. Francis Davis
The Aspen Institute Wye Center
Queenstown, Maryland
December 7–9, 1992

Media literacy is emerging as an important focus of education as well as an influential social movement during the 1990s. This paper sketches its growth, particularly in the United States, suggesting important sources for future direction.

Introduction

Since the days of radio, the American public has been at once mesmerized by electronic media and fearful of their influence. In April, 1939, an editorial in *Ladies Home Journal* reprints a letter from an incensed parent who claims that children's radio programs "glorify crime and violence, teach a vocabulary which is strong, to say the least," and allow children to "hear stories of disobedience to parents, disregard of law, indifference to school, the condoning of illicit love affairs and the acceptance of divorce." The writer concludes by saying that the only way to deal with these problems is to "let the advertiser know what we want."[1]

Though strident by most standards today, reports like this suggest that efforts by the public to influence electronic media have a long history in the United States—a history at least as long as the history of electronic media. Historical concern about the influence of media has led to at least **three distinct strategies for protecting or empowering the public**: 1) *Regulation*, 2) *Pressure* on advertisers and those responsible for creation of mass media, and 3) *Media education*.

All three strategies are unified by their common assumption that something about the mass media environment is problematic. The public must either be protected against media or empowered so that the negative effects of the mass media are lessened and the positive enhanced.

This paper sketches the growth of the latter **empowerment model** for media education, which itself has moved from a protectionist model to its current empowerment status. The **protectionist view**—which says that the public must be *protected* against the media—assumes that the public is not

able to fend off the negative effects of media. Citizens are seen as empty vessels waiting to be filled with whatever flows through the square box. Early media educators, as well as those fighting for regulation and pressuring media creators, tend toward this view of citizens as empty vessels.

The empowerment model, in contrast, sees citizens as continuously **negotiating meaning** as they watch, listen or read. This view sees citizens with media sharing the power to determine the influence of media. As this new empowered viewer perspective takes hold, a major change of focus from media **activism** to media **exploration** is occurring in the United States.

The empowerment model, in contrast, sees citizens as continuously **negotiating meaning** as they watch, listen or read. This view sees citizens with media sharing the power to determine the influence of media.

I. ***Media Activism***

David Buckingham has identified **three** distinct strands of reasoning used to encapsulate widespread **concern about the effects of media**: 1) *Moral panics*, 2) the *plug-in drug*, and 3) *consciousness industries*.[2] Each of these perspectives, propounded by widely divergent groups, sees audiences as primarily powerless in the face of media messages, and therefore in need of enlightened activist protection.

1. *Moral panics* refers to perspectives which view the media as contributing to the erosion of moral values. Primary concerns in this approach are violence and promiscuous sexuality, but research as to whether television or other popular media actually contribute to degradation of moral values has proved inconclusive—even contradictory.[3] Still, there is widespread public feeling that popular media negatively affect values.

2. *The plug-in drug* refers to Marie Winn's book of the same name, in which she is concerned not so much with the content of television, but the ways television-watching affects family dynamics and keeps children from doing more edifying things. The book provides a barrage of anecdotes which illustrate ways that television promotes laziness, lowers mental ability and numbs emotions.

3. Finally, *consciousness industries* refers to British media educator Len Masterman's assertion that television prepares us to be consumers through its constant repetition of commercials and fancy bedroom suites. Buckingham broadens the concept to include ideas such as the promotion of male-dominant gender roles and racist attitudes. Thus, media are seen as contributing to the perpetuation of a number of objectionable ideologies.

The argument can be concluded with the following:

> *Most arguments for Media Studies begin with two significant assertions. The first concerns the amount of time children spend with the media. Statistics on television viewing, for example, suggest that children today spend more time watching television than they spend in school. The second assertion appears to follow inexorably from the first. If the media are such a major element in children's lives, it seems self-evident that they must exert a very powerful influence on their ways of thinking about the world—and as such, [we] simply cannot afford to ignore them.*[4] (D. Buckingham)

Indeed, these assertions are convincing. But most attractive for the situation in the United States is their persuasiveness across the political spectrum. Those on the Right, with their "moral panic" ideologies, as well as those on the Left, who see the media perpetuating problematic "consciousnesses": consumerism, sexism, etc., are nonetheless united in a view of the media as a powerful and predominantly negative influence.

This has been used to great advantage in establishing the need for media education in Britain and other countries, and will likely need to be used in the United States as well. However, Buckingham points out that a distinction must be made between "simpler, more rhetorical arguments which may be of use in promoting Media Studies, and the more complex understanding which should inform classroom [and community educational] practice."[5]

In other words, the media influence argument is perfectly adequate —and necessary—in selling the idea of media education, but in practice it results in an activist stance in which certain ideologies about the media are pushed as a way of protecting students from "bad" ideologies, rather than an exploratory stance in which participants probe their relationship with media, trusted to raise issues and questions in response to media "texts." The latter must be the focus of practical media education efforts in the United States—it must encourage creative exploration rather than activist protection. **Thus, media education efforts in the United States must move from activism to exploration.**

II. The Protectionist Model

Though there is a history of media activism in the United States, media education has failed to secure a strong standing. The reasons for this are related to the public perception of *media influence* already mentioned. Americans have assumed that media exert a profound *long-term* influence which is predominantly negative. As a result, media education efforts in the United States have been *protectionist* efforts affording protection against the harmful effects of media.[6] There are *two principle variations* on the **protectionist** model.

A. *Teaching "True" Art*

On one hand, some say that media education must instill in students a love for classical, authentic "culture"—love of the classics of literature, art and music. The argument goes that there is a vast gulf between the tastes and intellectual rigor needed to understand true art as compared with the virtual lack of prerequisite demands called for by popular media. So, in this view, the purpose of media education is to teach students to appreciate and demand "true" art rather than media art. This bias against popular media is one important reason media education has not been seen as legitimate.

So, in this view, the purpose of media education is to teach students to appreciate and demand "true" art rather than media art. This bias against popular media is one important reason media education has not been seen as legitimate.

For example, David R. Sirota, a consultant to one of four U.S. Office of Education-funded media education projects in the late 1970s,[7] and a professor at New York University's School of the Arts, states that "from the vantage point of those who are most concerned with television as corrupter of culture, i.e. the arts, [television's] introduction into mainstream school life would be a disaster."[8] Though he admits that "developing a critical viewer, a more prudent and vigilant viewer is a noble ambition, for by better understanding television and its structure, its influence might be mitigated."[9]

Another variation of this view is propounded by Neil Postman in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Postman argues that reading is a logical process requiring concentration and judgment. To read, we consume ideas left to right, making continual judgments of truth and falsehood. Watching television, however, is completely different. By nature it is discontinuous: Heart-wrenching stories of flood and famine are followed by happy people wearing deodorant. Through this process of disconnected stories and emotions, habits of logic and thinking are numbed.

Postman also admits, however, that there is merit in the idea of media education—though he questions its practicality. Says Postman: "Bertrand Russell used to utter a lovely phrase. He said that the purpose of education was to teach each of us to defend ourselves against the 'seductions of eloquence.' In the realm of the word, we learn the specific techniques used to resist these seductions: logic, rhetoric, and literary criticism. What worries me is that we have not yet figured out how to build defenses against the seductions of imagery."[10]

Again we see a protectionist approach for dealing with the essentially negative impact of popular media. As a result, media education has often been seen as irreconcilable with effective mainstream education.

B. ***The Discriminating Viewer***

There is a second variation of the protectionist model, however, which has offered much more promise. This model is more sympathetic toward media, arguing that mass media can and often do create worthy art. The goal of media education, in this view, is to accentuate the positive in media. Thus media educators have been able to teach **discrimination** among media, looking for the best and avoiding the worst.

The goal of media education, in this view, is to accentuate the positive in media. Thus media educators have been able to teach **discrimination** among media, looking for the best and avoiding the worst.

Early on, this was usually attempted by means other than education, for example, by encouraging regulation or by pressuring advertisers through the threat of boycotts. The goal was to get the worst programs off the air. However, one organization, as far back as 1935, took a different approach.

This organization was the *American Council for Better Broadcasts (ACBB),*[11] which focused on raising "the level of thinking and taste"[12] of the public so that it would, in turn, demand higher quality programs. FCC Commissioner Abbott Washburn summed this up well at the annual ACBB Conference in 1979: "TV literacy is the road to excellence. The solution is long-range. It will take years to develop a literate, critical-demanding audience. But the process, happily has begun. . . . The end result will be more programs of lasting value. The increased number of discriminating viewers will mandate this. If fluff isn't watched, it won't be on."[13]

This ideal of **discrimination** was an important element of every media education project in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s—a time of particular interest to those interested in U.S. media education efforts because a flurry of activity resulted from several development grants. Examples of the discrimination ideal include a project funded by the Idaho Department of Education in 1978 (Milton Ploghoft and James Anderson), which identified critical "receivership skills," necessary, in part, so that viewers would be able to "identify and understand motives and purposes for attending to TV programs," in order to "be more receptive to some content and less open to other ideas and images."[14] Another project, a primary school curriculum developed by the *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)* beginning also in 1978, listed as one of its goals that students be able to "make judicious use of viewing time."[15] And a related project designed for high school students sought to enable youth to become "discriminating television viewers," making choices—"in viewing and among content."[16]

These excerpts illustrate well the centrality of the discrimination model in U.S. media education. It is important to note, however, that the ideal of discrimination still suggests a basically **passive** role for the viewer in the process of **making meaning** with media. That's why, in the discrimination model,

it is so important to watch only the best shows: because media are so powerful (and viewers so weak in comparison) that their influence is irresistible.

It is important to note, however, that the ideal of discrimination still suggests a basically **passive** role for the viewer in the process of **making meaning** with media.

Examples of this **passive viewer** model are most obvious in research and curriculum involving younger children. Probably the most famous of these are Dorothy and Jerome Singer's research, which showed connections between television watching and aggressiveness, as well as between television watching and positive behaviors such as cooperation, creativity and language development.[17] However, the most important finding was that children's attitudes and behaviors related most closely to "the presence and behavior of parents when the television was turned on."[18]

The implications of this for media education with children are illustrated well in a study done by SEDL, which found that when watching an educational television show, mediation by a teacher significantly increased children's learning.[19] Thus, in the first of four projects funded by the United States Office of Education (USOE) in 1978, SEDL emphasized adult mediation of television as central to effective media education for primary school children. **Adult interaction** with television—not just adult presence while children watch—was seen as necessary for significant learning. Children were seen as basically *passive* viewers without adults present. But it was this very idea—that media-users are basically passive—that was challenged by bringing television and other mass media into the classroom.

This is seen first in two of the other projects funded by the USOE in 1978, as well as in other projects begun at about the same time. Some of these were: the project developed by WNET/13 in New York (junior high), the project developed by Far West Laboratory in San Francisco (high school), the Idaho Department of Education project, and a project called *Television Awareness Training (T-A-T)*, developed by the *Media Action Research Center*. Several organizations including the National PTA used these materials in local media education efforts.

III. Uses & Gratifications

Each of these projects were organized around what has been called **uses and gratifications theory**.[20] While all the projects include viewer discrimination as an important element of their desired outcomes, uses and gratifications theory represents an important step toward an understanding of a more active viewer, in effect saying that **"television does not 'do things' to people, but rather, people 'do things' with television."** The content of a show—up to this point often the central concern of media education—is only important

if it helps attain some gratification for the viewer.[21] James Anderson describes these approaches:

> *[They] first direct students toward their motives for viewing television. Next, they help students develop standards by which television use can be evaluated as a gratification for those motives. Finally, they provide practice in the process of making decisions about media use.*[22]

The middle step, that of helping students develop standards, involves the development of critical thinking skills, applying these to media. For example, the WNET project (grades 6–8), includes activities designed to recognize main ideas, classify details, recognize and interpret literary elements (characterization, plot, conflict, setting, mood, tone, theme, point of view), identify symbolism, distinguish fact and opinion, identify stereotypes, recognize dialects, determine effects of media, and develop criteria for evaluation.[23] These skill-building exercises are designed to "provide students with the inner resources for making their own decisions about the television programs they watch,"[24] rather than imposing the teacher's standards.

These skill-building exercises are designed to "provide students with the inner resources for making their own decisions about the television programs they watch," rather than imposing the teacher's standards.

In fact, the written materials for these projects make a point to caution teachers against imposing their values on students. The curriculum guide concerning commercials developed by the Idaho Department of Education for elementary children reminds teachers: "Children are capable of making market decisions to meet their needs. Their criteria may not agree with ours but are usually justified."[25]

Another example of the increasing acceptance of **uses and gratifications theory** was a change made in 1983 by the *National Telemedia Council* (formerly the *American Council for Better Broadcasts*) in their listener-viewer opinion poll. Before 1983, the project was called the *Look–Listen Opinion Poll*, and it was just that—a compilation of viewer and listener opinions about programs. In 1983, however, a new project replaced it, called *Project Look–Listen–Think–Respond*. Instead of a straightforward opinion poll, it now became a tool for critical and reflective thought about media. As in the other projects mentioned, the purpose of the new format was **to help children develop their own criteria for viewing and listening.**

It was around this same time also (1975–1982) that critical thinking applied to media began to show up occasionally in college mass media courses. Since there were few appropriate textbooks, however, the onus for developing coursework was usually on the shoulders of college professors, many of whom combined critical thinking with their already-existing media

production classes (Broadcasting, Television Production, etc.). For the most part, however, one could still manage to graduate from a college communications department in the United States in 1992 with little or no training in critical thinking about media.

This was because when funding for the four USOE seed grants ended in 1982, progress in media education in the United States virtually stopped. One of the USOE projects, the Boston University project designed for post-secondary education, even won the dubious distinction of Senator William Proxmire's *Golden Fleece Award*, which criticizes wasteful government spending, for what critics claimed was simply "teaching college students how to watch television." (Though it was much more than that!)

IV. Cultural Studies

However, in other countries, particularly Britain, Canada and Australia, media education developed at least two additional strands. The first of these, **cultural studies**, is related to the concept of media as "consciousness industries" mentioned earlier in this paper. It was suggested that the view is primarily **protectionist** because it implies citizens must be **protected** against objectionable ideologies like consumerism or sexism. The cultural studies approach developed quickly in Britain, where the educational climate made it easier to implement. There media education drew heavily on a view which saw media decisions related primarily to economics. Thus, British educator Len Masterman, in a presentation made in Canada in 1990,[26] felt justified in saying that the single most important area of study for media education is **advertising**—in all its dimensions—especially those we don't usually think of as advertising like t-shirts, public relations stories and planned news events.

"The single most important area of study for media education is **advertising**—in all its dimensions—especially those we don't usually think of as advertising like t-shirts, public relations stories and planned news events."
(Len Masterman)

One group of U.S. organizations that similarly questioned the economic underpinnings of media, though more indirectly, were alternative media—or **media arts**—organizations. These groups emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s across the country.[27] The apparent impetus for their growth was the monopoly on filmmaking held by the major networks and major film production companies,[28] as well a desire to give disparate cultural voices a platform to speak out. Appalshop, for example, a media arts organization in Eastern Kentucky, was originally created to counter the stereotypes seen in numerous media renditions of "hillbillies."[29]

One of the continuing strengths of these organizations today is their ability to provide a critique of American culture by presenting something

other than mainstream perspectives in media products. And media arts organizations have routinely combined the showing and producing of alternative films with community education efforts, teaching political and social analysis of media as well as media production skills.[30]

The political side of this suggests one of its most important elements: It positions media education as necessary for political awareness and, therefore, democracy. As Len Masterman says: "It is no exaggeration to say that party leaders are now packaged and presented to us as though they were packets of soap or corn flakes."[31] So, according to Masterman, media education is needed in order to **deconstruct** packaged politicians and insure an informed citizenry.

It positions media education as necessary for political awareness and, therefore, democracy.

But the cultural studies approach is not limited only to political or even economic questions. George Gerbner suggests that media study is in fact "tantamount to reinstituting liberal education, for it liberates the individual from an unquestioning dependence on the immediate cultural environment by looking forward and backward to science, arts, the classics, and the achievements of humankind."[32] **Cultural studies, his idea suggests, broadens the meaning of the word "culture" to include the entire social environment.**

Thus, a shopping mall, for example, becomes a **text** through which students are encouraged to compare assumptions about public space in a mall to the ancient Greek public square. Or the same shopping mall can be compared to a series of television commercials to determine how each reinforces the other. Or a physics textbook becomes an object for analysis, using other texts, public understanding of science, and a Carl Sagan PBS special to judge its accuracy or usefulness.

These kinds of connections became routine in the cultural studies model of media education efforts in Canada, Britain and Australia during the 1980s.

V. The Active Viewer

The other strand of media education that developed outside the United States was **audience theory**. In places like Ontario, Canada, where teachers were practicing media education regularly, it became apparent that the protectionist model just didn't work. Among other things, students weren't interested in "good" TV—they wanted to talk about *Fresh Prince* and *Beverly Hills 90210*. And the critical thinking ideals, with constructs such as "receivership skills," though useful, sometimes seemed irrelevant. Students could identify stereotypes and production techniques such as dissolves, but these skills had little impact on their eventual use of media. Even the cultural

studies model seemed forced at times, as teachers chose media "texts" that were obviously racist or sexist so that students had little choice but to mimic the teacher's viewpoint.[33]

At the same time, a new theory of **active viewership** was gaining acceptance among media educators. One of the theorists who heralded this movement was Australian John Fiske. About television, Fiske says: "A convenient place to start is with the simple notion that television broadcasts programs that are replete with **potential meanings**"[34] [emphasis added]. The producer of the show may **prefer** that the viewer adopt a particular meaning, Fiske said, but viewers are not predictable. In fact, the meaning of a show can be interpreted in completely different ways by different viewers. The viewer can even choose interpretations that are **not** intended by the producers.

By inference this also means that students may be more sophisticated in their understandings of media than previously imagined. Buckingham says:

> *Teaching about teenage magazines, for example, has rarely advanced beyond the routine condemnation of 'sexism' to investigate the complex and contradictory ways in which they are actually read, particularly by girls. The possibility that the magazines may serve positive functions for girls, or that they might already be read in a relatively distanced or critical way, is effectively discounted. Underlying the seemingly open invitation to analyze and discuss is the implicit assumption that the magazines are responsible for imposing false ideologies on their readers, and that readers simply swallow them whole.*[35]

One of the more successful strategies used to counteract this charge and take seriously the active viewer theory is the **inquiry model**. In this approach, the teacher tries to explore a media "text" without any preconceived agenda. A 30-second commercial is shown, for example, after which the teacher asks "What issues does this raise?"[36] Students are then responsible for asking their own questions of the media text. Then students make educated guesses as to correct answers, finally taking on assignments aimed at proving or disproving their hypotheses. Reports on use of this model in Canada are encouraging.

VI. Where We Are Now

Unfortunately, the **inquiry model**—and other student-centered teaching strategies like it—demand a teaching paradigm markedly different from that practiced in most U.S. schools today. The typical U.S. model is pragmatic and skill-based, relying on rote learning and lecture.[37] One explanation for this is the emphasis on **job skills** in many U.S. schools, which results in the exclusive perpetuation of job-related mass media classes like Journalism and Broadcasting.

Similarly, much recent emphasis has been placed on the use of computers in schools, partly because computers also represent a pragmatic, job-related skill. Most schools now incorporate computers in learning, though the ratio of computers to students (30:1), and low computer competence among teachers (many of whom seldom use them) make their use infrequent and unimaginative. Sadly, computers are often only used to drill students in basic spelling or math.

In addition, media use in the classroom is often limited to teaching **with** media rather than **about** media. Videotapes, for example, are often used in a way very analogous to textbooks: Students are shown a videotape, then expected to regurgitate its content in a quiz or test. There is little exploration of how the videotape or the video format itself might color the content. Fortunately, the more frequent use of video in the classroom means that many U.S. teachers are now comfortable teaching **with** media, but teaching **about** media—as media educators do in other countries—is still rare.

Media use in the classroom is often limited to teaching **with** media rather than **about** media.

Furthermore, the issue of **change** in U.S. schools—badly needed to implement media education—has itself become a contentious issue. The back-to-the-basics movement, in vogue for the past decade, is one example: The public is unfriendly to the idea of student-centered learning because educators, parents and politicians alike are more comfortable returning to older ways—which often means lecture and "drill sergeant" learning.

The challenge to media education is perhaps best illustrated in the divisive issue of **textbooks**.[38] Some activists are focused on assuring that fair representation is provided in textbooks for all races, nationalities and ethnic groups. Others are equally insistent that "history should not be changed." These attitudes present clear evidence that the public assigns great power to media (textbooks are media too). But the actions of those involved make it further clear that **protection** is the first line of defense. Thus, parents and others continue to want strict, controlled, protectionist learning environments for their children.

Signs of change, however, are discernible in the less traditional arenas of religious and corporate education. Building on the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, more liberal elements of the church—both Protestant and Catholic—have been enacting student-centered learning for more than a decade.[39] Says Freire: "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students."[40]

The result is a large group of educators who, if not in fact using a more democratic style of teaching, at least are struggling to do so. In fact, many public school teachers share their concern because of exposure to Freire while students themselves—or through exposure to related models such as **experiential learning.**

In addition, corporate trainers have embraced strategies such as **adult learning theory**, which recognizes that different people have different learning styles. Thus, one person may learn better through rote repetition, while another learns best through discussion with co-learners. And since these trainers must often concern themselves with results—even quantifying learning in dollar terms—the most effective learning strategies win out. These have inevitably been **individual** and **experiential**—exactly what is needed to expand the definition of media education beyond job-based, rote learning.

A. *New Organizations*

These trends have been followed carefully by several national organizations which have emerged as signposts in the U.S. media education movement. The *National Telemedia Council (NTC)*, the oldest of these, is currently building a national database of media educators, organizations and resources.[41] This is one of the most important projects underway for the future of media education. In addition, *NTC* continues its *Project Look–Listen–Think–Respond*, mentioned earlier.

Two newer organizations have also taken on leadership roles: the *Center for Media and Values* in Los Angeles and *Strategies for Media Literacy* in San Francisco. These organizations have been responsible for practically all new curricula in media education since 1990.

The *Center for Media and Values*, created in 1989, grew out of perhaps the strongest advocate of the cultural studies approach in the United States during the 1980s, *Media&Values* magazine. *Media&Values*, founded in 1977 by Elizabeth Thoman, earned a reputation in the 1980s for consistently providing key analysis of media from a cultural studies perspective—at a time when most of this work was happening outside the United States. Topics of analysis included the media's connection to violence, racism, militarism, elections and a host of other social issues.

Starting in 1990, the Center began publishing Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ along with each issue of *Media&Values*. These kits include lesson plans, handout masters and occasional videotapes and are designed for use in adult education.

One of the Center's most ambitious projects, however, is a recently-published media literacy primer for high schools called *Living in the Image Culture*. This kit has been adapted for use in Catholic schools and parishes in a project funded by the Catholic Communication Campaign of the U.S. Catholic Conference in collaboration with the influential *National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)*. It is expected to reach a large number of the 18,000 Catholic parishes and 8,000 Catholic schools in the United States.

The other new organization, *Strategies for Media Literacy*, created in 1988, focuses exclusively on classroom education. Activities include teacher workshops and sharing of ideas and resources for teaching through its newsletter. Strategies' most important contribution was the 1991 publication of *Media & You*, a curriculum to teach media literacy skills for elementary

grades. Written by Strategies' executive director Kathleen Tyner and Donna Lloyd-Kolkin of *Far West Laboratory*. *Media & You* is the only current, comprehensive teaching guide available from a U.S. publisher for lower grades. Strategies recently released another major contribution, a videodisk-based exploration of media and advertising, which uses a Macintosh computer to access video examples and play them back on a television.

B. ***1992—A Year of Important Events***

In addition, 1992 has been a year of particular activity in U.S. media education, with three major conferences taking place, one co-sponsored by the *National Alliance of Media Arts Centers (NAMAC)*, another co-sponsored by the *National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)*, and another series of conferences co-sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. These were in addition to the second conference of Ontario's *Association for Media Literacy*, which had more than 500 participants—80 from the United States (compared to less than 20 at the first *AML* conference two years previous).

The **NCTE Conference** was significant not only because the NCTE is the largest professional teachers organization in the United States. The conference also represented an important step: By sponsoring a conference on media education, two NCTE sub-organizations, the *Commission on Media* and the *Assembly on Media Arts* took seriously a position they have offered for many years: that various media—not print only—ought to be part of the accepted English curriculum. And because the conference was co-sponsored by *Educational Video*, an alternative media organization in New York, it combined practical lessons in media production with media education theory. This was the first time these groups in the NCTE went beyond the publishing of position papers on the need for media education to taking action, in this case sponsoring a teacher-centered, practical conference on how to teach about media.

The purpose of the **Annenberg Conferences** is to summarize current knowledge about the effects of media and to chronicle current work in media research and education. The second of these conference, held in April, brought together media educators, media producers and media effects researchers, organizing them into four task groups related to concerns about television content for children: information/education, violence, advertising, and stereotypes. Participants drew on their expertise to make several recommendations, including the creation of a resource directory for media education and a push to elevate the sense of urgency for media literacy in the national agenda.

The latest Annenberg conference, involving media effects researchers only, was held in November, and at least one additional conference is planned before a report on findings is published in 1993. This report should prove important as the United States moves toward a more coherent vision of needs, goals, and definitions for media education.

The **other U.S. conference** was perhaps the most important in terms of the practical, day-to-day future of media education in the United States. This conference was actually sponsored by three organizations: *NAMAC, Strategies for Media Literacy* and a media arts center in Houston, *Southwest Alternate Media Project*. The conference was organized to address a perceived lack of communication between educators, artists and policy-makers in their work on media education. It resulted in the formation of *NAME*, the *National Alliance for Media Education*, a "coalition of artists and educators to promote media education in the U.S."[42]

NAME immediately secured a $50,000 seed grant from the NEA Media Arts Division to establish a coordinator and begin work on development of a network of media educators, artists and organizations. In addition, NAME is now working on a public education project aimed at putting media education on the national agenda. Their feeling is that media education will remain difficult to implement locally until it is part of the national educational agenda.

In addition, NAME is working to create a directory of resources for media education. Rather than create its own database, however, NAME is negotiating with the *National Telemedia Council (NTC)* to merge its list of names, organizations and resources with the NTC database. Other organizations, including the *Center for Media and Values*, have endorsed this idea also.

As all this makes clear, the present is an exciting moment for media education in the United States. However, one non-U.S. organization deserves mention also because of its contribution to U.S. efforts: Ontario's *Association for Media Literacy (AML)* is now recognized as a world leader in media education. *AML* leaders have published several major secondary media education textbooks since 1988. The *AML* is responsible for much of the growing U.S. knowledge in the field, either through direct imitation or through having introduced U.S. leaders to British and Australian educators. The fledgling U.S. media education effort owes much to the pioneering efforts of the *AML*.

VII. Summary and Recommendations

A. *Summary*

The above organizations and trends show that a media education movement is indeed emerging in the United States. While there are still many questions as to the shape and content of the movement, several developments are clear:

- At least two major advances have taken place in media education over the past ten years (largely without input from the United States): **Audiences are now seen as much more active than before, and the cultural studies approach has become an important focus of media education.**

- The concept of an active audience demands a democratic, individualized learning environment more similar to the experiential learning taking place in some American churches and businesses than to the rote, lecture-centered learning taking place in many American classrooms. **Thus, effective media education may require major reform in American schools.**

- Significant work has been done lately in the United States and in Canada. This work is nurturing the field of media education, pushing it beyond its current precarious position in the United States onto a more stable footing.

However, the most important issue still facing media education in the United States is **convincing others of the importance of media education**. The media influence theory, though problematic because of its tendency to result in **activist–protectionist** media education, offers the most promise in convincing the American public about the need for media education. It also offers the opportunity to recapture the education agenda from more conservative thinkers opposed to change by acknowledging their concern about the influence of media. However, several other arguments for the importance of media education are compelling and need to be mentioned:[43]

The most important issue still facing media education in the United States is **convincing others of the importance of media education**.

- Media education is important because it encourages **reflection** on **personal values**.

  The underlying concern implied in the media influence theory is a **concern for values**—parents are afraid that media are teaching immorality, sexism, etc. In media education, children are encouraged to challenge and question the values and messages with which they are confronted. No media "text"—even a textbook—is left unchallenged.[44]

- Media education is important because it **involves emerging technologies**—including computers—**in learning**.

  The merging of digital technology and media make it appropriate and essential to include computer training as well as media production training in schooling. Personal computers are now a platform for media production, allowing sophisticated manipulation of images—even the creation of movies—with a computer.

  Significant also, however, is the **centrality of these technologies in the future workplace**. Media education, by including as part of its goal the effective use of these technologies, can thus make its case even stronger.

- Media education is important because it offers **a needed program of educational reform** that encourages critical thinking, problem solving and creativity.

  Media literacy education is more than just a discrete topic to be added to the curriculum of U.S. schools. It is, as well, an entire philosophy of teaching that encourages questioning and **exploration** as an integral part of the learning process **all across the curriculum:** Teachers not only teach **with media**, they teach **about** media: They encourage skepticism about all media "texts." Thus media education has the potential to reform education, making it more open to creative and critical thinking, and more open to a democratic teaching style.

- Media education **strengthens democracy**.

  Media education strengthens democracy by providing tools for political analysis. In addition, because media education is more student-centered and therefore more **democratic** itself, it encourages democratic attitudes that will carry forward to adulthood. Democracy in the classroom encourages democracy in public life.

B. *A Definition of Media Literacy*

Though this paper has dealt primarily with the need for new classroom educational strategies for children, its conclusions are equally applicable to adult education. However, adult media education needs a somewhat different emphasis: It must question the common assumption that the influence of media is mostly negative. This is not to say that energy should be spent trying to convince adults that media are not bad (frankly, that would be a waste of time), rather North American adults need to experience their own as well as their childrens' active reading of media. In this way, they will become convinced that people can enhance their ability to engage and filter media to their own ends.

Beginning with this understanding of more active media "readers," then, a tentative definition of media literacy for the U.S. context can be proposed:

> ***Media literacy is the ability to analyze, augment and influence active reading (i.e., viewing) of media in order to be a more effective citizen.***

The three verbs in this definition are important and correspond roughly to: *consumer* skills, *user* skills and *producer* skills:

Analyze *(consumer skill):* The media literate person recognizes that she is actively negotiating meaning with media "texts." In addition, she is aware of factors which affect that negotiation, including personal factors like gender, race, skills, and how she is wanting to use the "text." She is also aware of text-related factors like the medium through which it is presented, its

Analysis: the Active Viewer Model

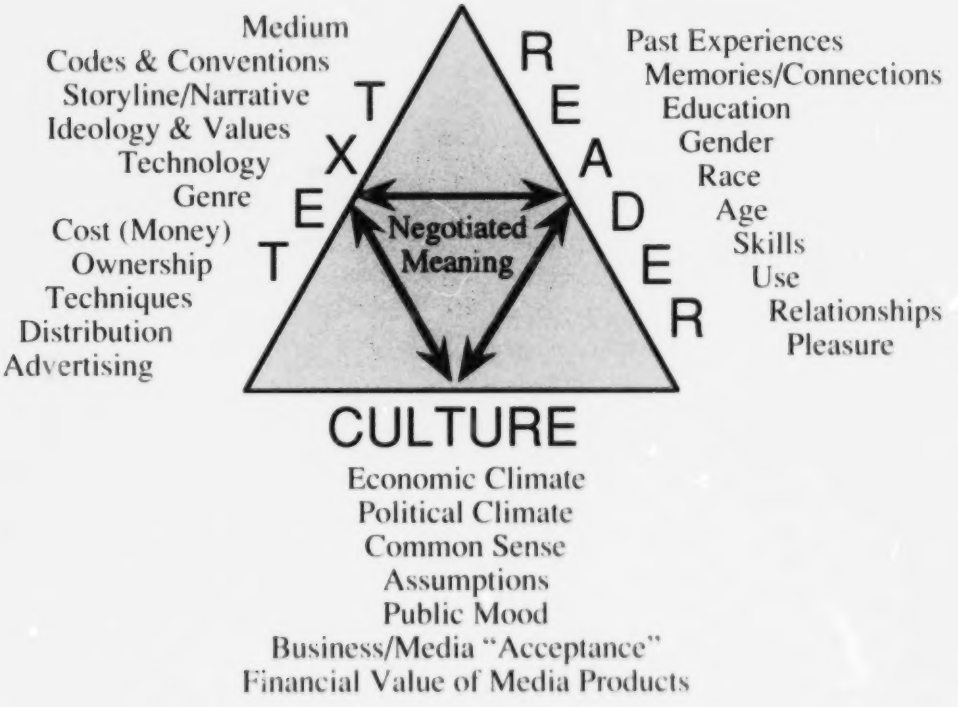


Figure 1

ideology and the underlying motivations of the producers of the text. Finally, she is aware of cultural factors which influence reading of the text, such as the economic and political climate (see fig. 1).

Augment *(user skill):* The media literate person is able to locate appropriate additional resources to further study any topic of interest—for example, a political story in the newspaper. This ability includes being able to effectively use appropriate technology such as computers, VCRs and videotape recorders (for the capturing of firsthand knowledge).

Influence *(producer skill):* The media literate person is able to deliberately change the impact or meaning of messages—for example, a television news report that suggests *all students at Clairmont High School are vandals.* Thus, the media literate student, armed with appropriate hardware, can create a narrative that supports her viewpoint that most Clairmont students are not vandals.

As this definition makes clear, the central concept behind it is the desire to create **effective citizens**—that is, citizens who are able to **analyze** and use

media messages as well as **create** their own messages. The definition also takes seriously the *active viewer* concept, while at the same time securing a place for all flavors of media education presently practiced in the United States, including computer and technology education as well as production-oriented high school and college classes such as Journalism and Broadcasting.

C. ***Other Recommendations and Future Issues***

The following additional recommendations are also suggested:

- The United States needs a **national network of media educators** to share important developments in media education. The work of the *National Telemedia Council* is a good start and needs to be supported and strengthened, perhaps with additional seed funding to expand or include a supplement to *NTC's* newsletter—even combining it with newsletters of other organizations (NAMAC and the NCTE's Assembly on Media Arts come to mind). The *NTC* should also be encouraged to include adult education as well as classroom education as a priority.

- Similarly, an **international network of media educators** is also needed. A good start has been made in this regard by the *Jesuit Communication Project* in Toronto, but it also needs considerable support.

- For now, educators in the United States should draw heavily on the work of the *Association for Media Literacy* (secondary media education), and the *British Film Institute* (primary media education) for teaching strategies and conceptual structure.

The following issues need to be addressed for the growth of media education in the United States:

- **Entry point.** Most current media education models see media education infused throughout the school curriculum and throughout all grades (including preschool), but this level of implementation is not likely in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the question for education in the United States remains: **where is the best place for beginning implementation of media education?** In the Canadian model, secondary English has been the entry point. Where should we focus our energies in the U.S.? Should we also begin with secondary English?

  Possible resources: The experimental media education program started in 1991 at the Oyster River Elementary School in Durham, New Hampshire. Also, the program now being implemented at K-12 Athens Academy in Athens, Georgia.[45]

- **Leadership training.** Who will provide training for teachers? There is a serious need for degree programs in media education to train

professors who will then train teachers. Several high profile universities need to establish this as a priority. For now, Ph.D. candidates in media education must go to other countries.

In addition, there is a need for **in-service** training for current teachers. Several individuals and organizations, including *Strategies for Media Literacy* and some media arts organizations have been providing this so far.

Finally, a training program needs to be established to train adult leaders in churches and community organizations for **adult media education.** The *Center for Media and Values* and organizations like *Citizens for Media Literacy* (Asheville, NC) may be resources here.

- **Role of professional media.** What role will reporters, producers, major networks, and major cable providers play in encouraging media education? Promotion of the concept of the **active viewer** as well as financial support—at least until states take over—are needs.

- **Classroom resources.** A minimum set of appropriate classroom research resources for media education needs to be devised. Teachers cannot "release" students to study media in individual ways without these resources. A media education reference CD-ROM is one suggestion. Who will develop this and who will fund it?

  An important resource in this effort is the *Center for Media and Values*, which has collected a substantial resource library and has developed a detailed classification index for media and related social issues. This index could be very useful for media research—particularly for the cultural studies approach—if a plan and funding for its implementation can be established.

- **State curriculum guidelines.** Media educators must work to get media education included in statewide curriculum guidelines. This was an important turning point in the media education efforts in Ontario for the *Association for Media Literacy*.

Special thanks for assistance and input to: Charles Firestone and Katharina Kopp, *Aspen Institute;* Elizabeth Thoman, *Center for Media and Values;* Barry Duncan, *Association for Media Literacy;* Marieli Rowe, *National Telemedia Council;* Julian Low, *National Alliance of Media Arts Centers;* James Brown, *University of Alabama;* Kathleen Tyner, *Strategies for Media Literacy;* Deborah Leveranz, *Southwest Alternate Media Project*, and Elizabeth Zappa, my wife.

All contents, © 1992, J. Francis Davis for The Aspen Institute

Footnotes

1. Gould, Bruce and Gould, Beatrice Blackmar, "Harmful Children's Radio Programs" (editorial). *Ladies Home Journal*, Vol. 56, April, 1939, p. 4.
2. Buckingham, David, "Teaching About the Media," chapter one in *The Media Studies Book*, edited by David Lusted (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 12–35.
3. See Cooke, Patrick, "TV or Not TV?" *In Health*, Dec./Jan., 1992, pp. 33–43, for a discussion of the contradictions found in research about the effects of television.
4. Buckingham, ibid., p. 12.
5. Ibid., p. 13.
6. This has also been a common assumption in Britain, Canada and Australia, as well as in many other countries.
7. Sirota was a consultant to the project of public television station WNET/Thirteen, New York City. All four projects will be discussed later in this paper.
8. Sirota, David R., "The Development of Television Viewing Skills in Students: Proceed with Caution," New York: New York University, School of the Arts, ca. 1979 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 175 417), p. 5. Syntax and punctuation have been corrected in the quotes used here.
9. Ibid., p. 4.
10. Postman, Neil and Paglia, Camille, "She Wants Her TV! He Wants His Book!" *Harpers*, March, 1991, p. 47.
11. The ACBB was created in 1953, but its predecessor organization, the Madison, Wisconsin, chapter of the *American Association of University Women* began a listing of best radio programs in 1935.
12. From "An Historical Perspective: ACBB's 30 Years, 1953–1983" in the archives of the *National Telemedia Council* .
13. Ibid.
14. Ploghoft, M. E., and Anderson, J. A., *Teaching Critical Television Viewing Skills: An Integrated Approach* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1982), p. 5. Quoted from Brown, James A., *Television "Critical Viewing Skills" Education: Major Media literacy Projects in the United States and Selected Countries*, p. 70 (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991).
15. Brown, ibid. (see preceding footnote), p. 96.
16. From the introduction to *A Critical Television Viewing Skills Curriculum for High School Students*, Far West Laboratory, 1980. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 215 667, p. 223).
17. Brown, ibid., p. 155.
18. Ibid.
19. Corder-Bolz, Charles, "Mediation: The Role of Significant Others." *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Summer, 1980, p. 107. The educational television show used in this study was *Electric Company*.
20. Much of the categorization suggested here is based on a chart developed by Jacques Priette, "The Theoretical Lineage of Media Education Programs," which he is developing as part of his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Montreal.
21. Anderson, James A., "The Theoretical Lineage of Critical Viewing Curricula." *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Summer, 1980, p. 66.
22. Ibid.
23. Brown, ibid., p. 104.
24. WNET/Thirteen Education Department, *The Television Criti-Kit: Teacher's Guide* (New York: 1979), p. ii.
25. Anderson, ibid., p. 68.
26. At the Association for Media Literacy's first major conference in 1990. Masterman gave a keynote address.

27. The Foundation of Independent Video and Film, "Report: the 1979 National Conference of Media Arts Centers," p. 1. Copy obtained from the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers, Oakland, CA.
28. Feinstein, Peter, ed., "The Independent Film Community: A Report on the Status of Independent Film in the United States," 1977. Copy obtained from the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers, Oakland, CA.
29. Tyner, Kathleen, "The Appalshop School Initiative." *Strategies: A Quarterly Publication of Strategies for Media Literacy*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2/3, Spring/Summer 1992, p. 1 (San Francisco: Strategies for Media Literacy). This example was suggested by Deborah Leveranz of the *Southwest Alternate Media Project*.
30. Independent filmmakers and media arts organizations have also worked on simply expanding the definition of media art, by offering new avenues of artistic expression to the public.
31. Masterman, Len, *Teaching the Media*, p. 12 (New York: Routledge, 1985).
32. Brown, ibid., p. 17.
33. Ideas in this paragraph are based on a conversation with Barry Duncan, President of Ontario's *Association for Media Literacy*, in November, 1992.
34. Fiske, John, *Television Culture*, p. 1 (New York: Routledge, 1987).
35. Buckingham, David, ed., *Watching Media Learning: Making Sense of Media Education*, p. 8 (Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press, 1990).
36. This example was suggested by Barry Duncan of Ontario's *Association for Media Literacy* at a workshop for teachers at Athens Academy, Athens, Georgia, November 2, 1992. He explains the inquiry model in more detail in his text *Mass Media and Popular Culture*, pp. 211–212 (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada, Inc., 1988).
37. See Tyner, Kathleen, "Treading Water: Media Education in the United States," in Aparici, Roberto, ed., *Projecto Didactico Queria Madrid* (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones de la Torre, 1993). English draft copy of soon-to-be-published manuscript obtained from Strategies for Media Literacy, San Francisco, CA.
38. Kathleen Tyner has an especially good discussion of this issue in her article cited above.
39. Many are using a model called *social analysis*, which is based on experiential learning grounded in participant experience.
40. Freire, Paolo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Further bibliographical information unavailable at time of writing.
41. See *Telemedium*, the Newsletter of the National Telemedia Council, Inc., Vol. 38, Nos. 1–2, First Quarter, 1992, p. 1. Another helpful networking organization is KidsNet (Washington, DC), which lists resources for media education for children in its monthly Bulletin & Calendar.
42. "A NAME for the Media Literacy Game." *Strategies*, ibid. (footnote 29, above), p. 16.
43. The four points below were strongly influenced by Kathleen Tyner's article cited earlier (footnote 37).
44. This may in fact make it possible to *decentralize* the textbook approval process (which usually happens at a state level), allowing more choice (and more democracy) at the local level. Imagine parents and teachers choosing textbooks school-by-school! Thanks again to Kathleen Tyner's article for this note.
45. The Athens Academy project is being funded by a grant from the Bertlesmann Foundation (Germany).

Appendix B

Conference Participants/Media Literacy Organizations

The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy
The Aspen Institute Wye Center
Queenstown, Maryland
December 7–9, 1992

Ms. Patricia Aufderheide
Rapporteur
1845 Ingleside Terrace, NW
Washington, DC 20010-1009
202-885-2069
h: 202-462-5374
Internet: PAUFDER@AU.EDU

Mr. Wally Bowen
Executive Director
Citizens for Media Literacy
38½ Battery Park Avenue, Suite G
Asheville, NC 28801
704-255-0182
FAX: 704-254-2286

Dr. David Considine
Associate Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education
Appalachian State University
Boone, NC 28608
704-262-2224
FAX: 704-262-2686

Mr. August Coppola
Education First
1990 South Bundy Street
Los Angeles, CA 90025
310-442-3582

Mr. William V. Costanzo
Professor of English
Westchester Community College
Valhalla, NY 10595
914-285-6933, 30
FAX: 914-285-6513

Mr. J. Francis Davis
Author of Background Paper
670 Boulevard, SE
Atlanta, GA 30312
404-624-1805
FAX: 404-624-1805
Compuserve: 71277, 2353

Mr. Allen De Bevoise
AND Communications
Hollywood Center Studios
1040 N. Las Palmas, Building 27
Los Angeles, CA 90038
213-871-8181
FAX: 213-871-8282

Dr. Roger Desmond
Professor of Communication
University of Hartford
University Scholar
The Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6220
215-898-7041
FAX: 215-898-2024

Ms. Deirdre Downs
Executive Director
Downs Media Education Center
P.O. Box 1170
Stockbridge, MA 01262
413-298-0262
FAX: 413-298-4434

Mr. Barry Duncan
President
Association for Media Literacy
Head of English
Etobicoke Board of Education
40 McArthur Street
Weston, Ontario
M9P3M7 CANADA
416-394-6992
FAX: 416-394-6991

Ms. Karin Egan
Program Officer
The Carnegie Corporation
467 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
212-371-3200
FAX: 212-754-4073

Mr. Charles Firestone
Conference Moderator
Director
Communications and Society Program
The Aspen Institute
Washington, DC
202-736-5818
FAX: 202-986-1913

Dr. George Gerbner
Professor of Communication
The Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6220
FAX: 215-898-2024
Internet: FGG@ASC.UPENN.EDU

Mr. Steve Goodman
Executive Director
Educational Video Center
60 E. 13th Street, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10003
212-254-2848
FAX: 212-777-7940

Dr. Ingrid Hamm
Program Director
Communications and Media Research
Bertelsmann Foundation
Carl Bertelsmann Strasse 256
4830 Gutersloh #100
Germany
0049-5241-740625
FAX: 0049-5241-73882

Dr. Renee Hobbs
Professor of Communication
Babson College
One College Drive
Wellesley, MA 02157
617-239-4975
FAX: 617-239-4312
bitnet: HOBSS@BABSON.EDU

Ms. Karen Jaffe
Executive Director
KIDSNET
6856 Eastern Avenue, NW, Suite 208
Washington, DC 20012
202-291-1400
FAX: 202-882-7315

Ms. Bobbi Kamil
Executive Director
Cable in the Classroon
1900 N. Beauregard Street, Suite 108
Alexandria, VA 22311
703-845-1400

Ms. Katharina Kopp
Program Coordinator
Communications and Society Program
The Aspen Institute
Washington, DC
202-736-5818
FAX: 202-986-1913

Ms. Roselle Kovitz
Nebraska ETV Network
P.O. Box 8311
Lincoln, NE 68501
402-472-3611
FAX: 402 472-1785
edi407@linknet.cons

Ms. Deborah Leveranz
Director of Education
Southwest Alternate Media Project (SWAMP)
1519 West Main
Houston, TX 77006
713-522-8592
FAX: 713-522-0953

Dr. Kathryn Montgomery
Center for Media Education
P.O. Box 33039
Washington, DC 20033
301-270-3938
FAX: 301-270-2876

Ms. Marieli Rowe
Executive Director
National Telemedia Council, Inc.
120 E. Wilson Street
Madison, WI 53703
608-257-7712
FAX: 608-257-7714

Mr. Patrick Scott
Program Consultant, Mediascope
Burbank High School
845 N. Benton Way
Los Angeles, CA 90026
213-483-0216
FAX: 213-483-9498
Mediascope:
818-508-2080
FAX: 818-508-2088

Ms. Elizabeth Thoman
Executive Director
Center for Media and Values
1962 Shenandoah
Los Angeles, CA 90034
310-559-2944
FAX: 310-559-9396
peacenet: mvalues (ige@org.)

Ms. Kathleen Tyner
Executive Director
Strategies for Media Literacy, Inc.
1095 Market Street
Suite 410
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-621-2911
FAX: 415-255-9392

Mr. Marc Vinson
Fellow
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
102 Reynolda Village
Winston Salem, NC 27106-5123
919-748-9222
FAX: 919-777-0095

Ms. Karen Webster
New Hampshire Public Television
P.O. Box 1100
Durham, NH 03824
603-868-1100
FAX: 603-868-7552

Ms. Robin White
Project Coordinator
N. A. M. E.
c/o NAMAC
1212 Broadway, Suite 816
Oakland, CA 94612

or

84 Wooster Street
New York, NY 10012
212-941-5944
FAX: 212-941-5947

Mr. Joe Zesbaugh
Pacific Mountain Network
1550 Park Avenue
Denver , CO 80218
303-837-8000
FAX: 303-837-9797

APPENDIX C: Communications and Society Program – Policy Statement

The Aspen Institute's Communications and Society Program seeks to advance communications and information policy-making to the greatest benefit of society. The specific purposes of the Program are (1) to provide a neutral forum for divergent stakeholders to assess the impact of the communications and information revolutions on democratic institutions and values, (2) to help bring about integrated, thoughtful, value-based decision-making in the communications and information policy fields to cope with problems and challenges of the late 20th century and beyond, and (3) to offer, when appropriate, recommendations of policies and actions at local, state, national, and international levels. The specific issues that the Program seeks to explore in 1993 fall into the four categories listed below: communications policy-making, communications for social benefit, communications and education, and communications for global understanding. The subject areas are not mutually exclusive. Recent and future project titles are listed below:

1. COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

- Democracy in the Information Age (annual subscription seminar)
- Annual Conference on Telecommunications Policy
  - 1992 – Competition at the Local Loop: Policies and Implications
  - 1991 – Towards Consensus on American Telecommunications Policy
- Computer Research Policy Summit (1992)
- Aspen Communications Counsel's Forum
  - 1993 – Towards a Reformulation of the Communications Act
  - 1992 – A Preliminary Review of the Communications Act

2. COMMUNICATIONS FOR SOCIAL BENEFIT

- The Aspen Forum on Communications and Society (proposed)
- New Paradigms for a New Democracy (1993)
- Toward a Democratic Design for Electronic Town Meetings (1992)
- The Information Evolution:
  How New Information Technologies are Spurring Complex Patterns of Change (1992)
- Assessing the Public Broadcasting Needs of Minority and Diverse Audiences (1992)
- Television for the 21st Century: The Next Wave (1992)
- SeniorNet Services: Towards a New Environment for Seniors (1991)
- Online for Social Benefit (1989)

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND EDUCATION

- Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (1992)
- Defining Education's Role in Telecommunications Policy (1991)
- Telecommunications as a Tool for Educational Reform:
  Implementing the NCTM Mathematics Standards (1991)

4. COMMUNICATIONS FOR GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING

- The Writer as a Conscience of the World — 1993 Jerusalem International Book Fair Aspen Forum
- Television News Coverage of Minorities:
  Models and Options for the Commission on Television Policy (1992)
- Television and Elections (1992)

The Aspen Cube: A Three-Dimensional Roadmap for Communications Policy Issues

The field covered by The Aspen Institute's Communications and Society Program is vast, but the many issues it covers can be defined and interconnected by means of a three-dimensional matrix, a kind of Rubik's Cube of the Information Age. Along one axis are characteristic trends of the Information Age, which will vary:

Digitization, Convergence, and Compression
Commodification of Information
Virtuality/Networking and Simulation
Competition and Concentration
Interactivity and User Control

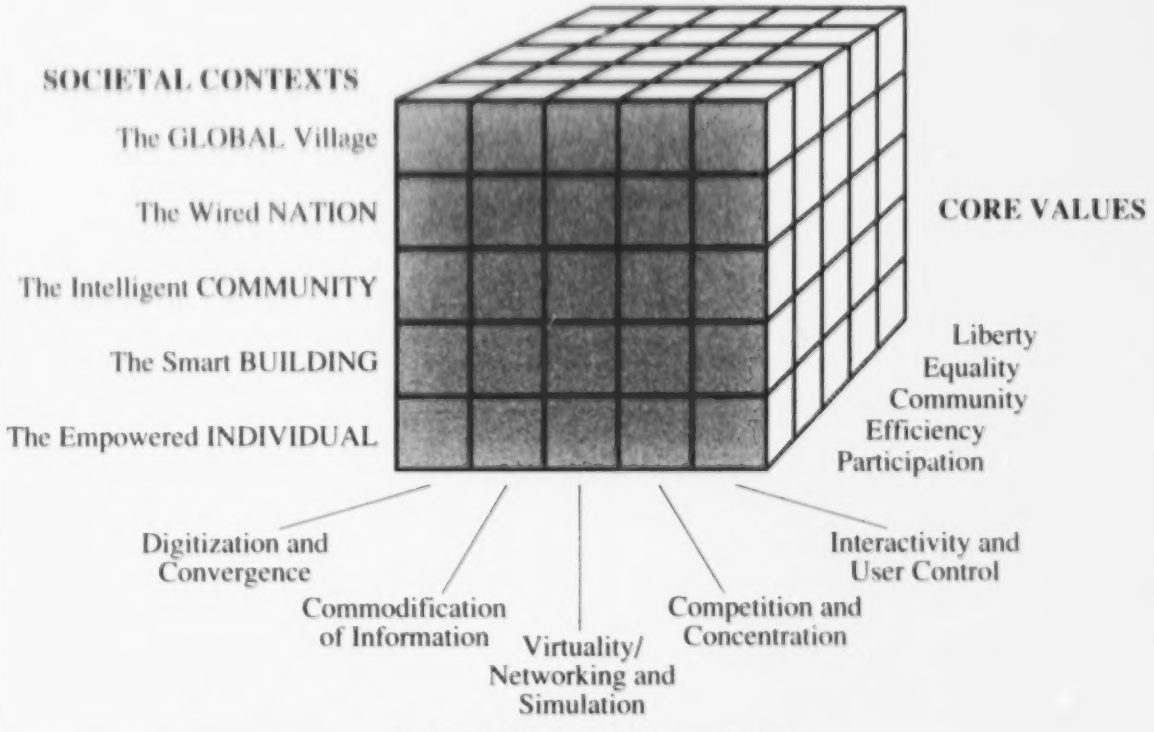
Across another side of the matrix are the societal contexts in which one should view the issues, viz., international; national; community; home, school, or office; and the individual. We use labels that have entered the vocabulary from the Communications Revolution:

The Global Village	*The Wired Nation*	*The Intelligent Community*	*The Smart Building*	*The Empowered Individual*

The third side of the cube lists the values that are most associated by the new communications media, structures, and institutions. This list, too, can vary. Our present approach looks at:

Liberty (including Privacy and Free Speech)
Equality (including Universality and Equity)
Community (including Diversity and Quality of Life)
Efficiency (including Productivity)
Participation (including Access)

This construct can be pictured as a cubic matrix. From any particular point or cube within the matrix, one can move along any or all of the three axes, connecting technological trends, strata of society, and values.



The Aspen Institute

Publications Office
P.O. Box 150
Queenstown, MD 21658

93W 605